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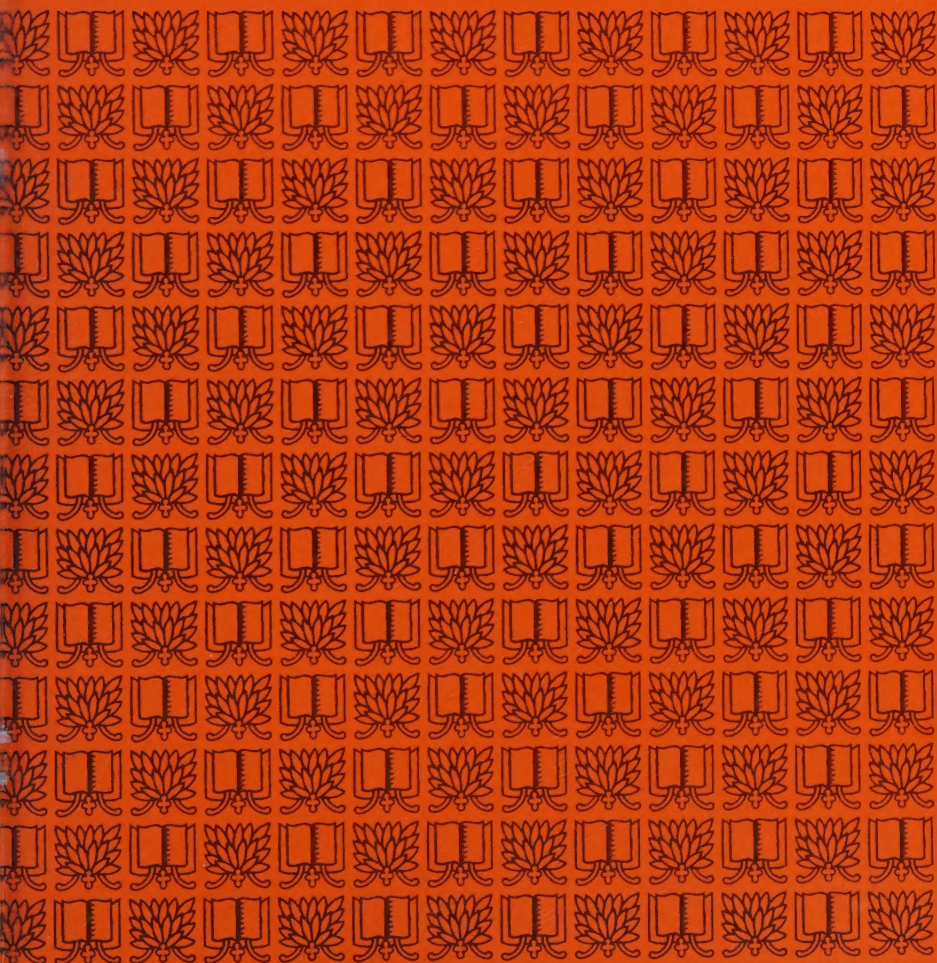
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Abraham's Trees^{*}

Dr Shaul Bar

Abstract

Tree worship was a well known phenomenon in the Ancient World. In the Hebrew Bible we read that Abraham lived next to trees and also planted a tree, while Jacob buried Deborah under a tree. Thus we will investigate if the Patriarch Abraham was engaged in religious rites at these trees. The end result will show that Abraham lived next to trees for safety reasons; trees were used as shade, fuel for cooking, or food for the flock. It was later Biblical reading and later traditions which associated Abraham with sacred trees. Therefore, not surprisingly the Aramaic translators avoided translating the word "tree."

1. Introduction

In the stories about the Patriarch Abraham, the Book of Genesis mentions trees such as the terebinth of Moreh(12:6); and the terebinth of Mamre(13:18;14:13;18:1). In addition, we read that Abraham planted a Tamarisk tree at Beer-Sheba and invoked the name of the Lord (21:33). In the ancient world, the phenomena of sacred trees associated with sacred places were well known. In fact, sacred trees are frequent in Mesopotamian iconography. The trees symbolized fertility and were associated with the fertility gods. According to Robertson Smith, prayers were addressed to them for

^{*} In memory of Jeff Parchman, a God-fearing man.

healing sickness, and for fertile seasons. Branches and leaves were used as medicine and for other ritual purpose. Many believed that oracles were received from the trees that the trees spoke with a voice and sometimes the voice of the tree was a wind in the branches which requires a soothsayer to interpret it.¹ Later we read that fertility cults were attractive to many Israelites, thus they built altars under trees and worshiped other gods. The book of Deuteronomy and other biblical texts condemn the places of worship “on the hills, under every verdant tree”(Deut 12:2; 1Kgs 14:23; 2Kgs 16:4; 17:10; Jer 2:20; Ezek 6:13; Hos 4:13). Thus, it's no surprise that the official religion of Israel forbade the planting of the trees next to the altar (Deut 16:21). This paper will explore the subject of trees in the Abrahamic cycle . We will find out if they have any religious meaning and why they are mentioned in Genesis.

2. A. Terebinth of Moreh

Abraham, upon his arrival to the Promised Land, stopped at the terebinth of Moreh אֵלֹן מֹרֶה (Gen 12:6). In most commentaries the word אֵלֹן is translated as terebinth. However, Zohary says that many translators and exegetes misunderstood the names אֵלֶה *elah*, אֵלֹן *elon*, אֵל *el*, אֵלָה *alah* and אֵלֹן *allon*. According to him *allon* and *elon* should be rendered oak, Tabor oak (*Quercus ithaburensis*) or the evergreen oak (*Quercus calliprinos*), while *elah* and *alah* should be terebinth.² This is noted already by the Ramban in his commentary on Gen 14:6 where he cites Isa 6:13 כָּאֵלֶה וְכָאֵלֹן and he translated it as a terebinth and as an oak where the reference is to various trees. Indeed, the Lxx translates our verse as ‘the high oak’ (τὴν δρῦν τὴν ὑψηλήν). While, Targum Onekols, Targum Neofiti 1 and Ps.-J renders for אֵלֹן “plain”. Likewise, Jerome rendered *convallis* in our verse and also in Gen 13:18; 14:13; 18:1, or by *vallis* Deut 11:30. According to Aberbach and Grossfeld the translation “plain of

¹ W. Robertson Smith, *Lectures on the Religion of the Semites* (London: Adam and Charles Black, 1907), p. 195.

² M. Zohary, *Plants of the Bible* (Cambridge: University Press, 1982), pp. 108-11.

Moreh,” came to remove Abraham from any association with centers of tree worship.³ Augustine Pagolu pointed out that the Hebrew word *elon* appears four times in Genesis, in two instances altars were associated with this tree (12:7;13:18). According to him: “the form *elon* seems to have had religious associations in all its occurrences in Genesis and Judges.⁴” However, we should stress that the Patriarch Abraham lived next to trees. The building of altars in Genesis came to commemorate God’s appearance and the trees have no religious significance as we shall see below.

Since the Hebrew word *moreh* means teacher, modern scholars speculate that it might be a reference to an ‘oracle giver’.⁵ Accordingly, the tree served as a place where oracles could be obtained and, therefore, a survival of primitive tree worship⁶. Gunkel for example rendered “oracle terebinth”. According to him, the voice of the tree is perceived in the rustling of its branches and interpreted by the oracle or priest.⁷ He points to the giant oak at Dodona, where its priest and priestess interpreted the noise of the leaves and the sounds of the spring that flowed out of its water.⁸ In the Homeric epic we read about Odysseus who goes to Dodona “to hear the will of Zeus from the high crested oak of the god”. Because of their size, strength and longevity, many honored and revered these trees and attributed to them certain sanctity.⁹ On the other hand, Sarna believes

³ Moses Aberbach and Bernard Grossfeld, *Targum Onkelos to Genesis* (New York: Ktav,1982), p.79.

⁴ Augustine Pagolu, *The Religion of the Patriarchs* (JSOTSup 277;Sheffield Academic Press: England, 1998),p.58

⁵ Claus Westermann, *Genesis 12-36*, trans. John J.Scullion S.J. (Augsburg: Minneapolis,1985),pp.153-154; Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 1-15*, (WBC 1;Word Books: Waco, Texas,1987),p. 279; E.A. Speiser, *Genesis*, (AB1;Doubleday: Garden City, New York, 1964),p.87.

⁶ John Skinner, *Genesis*, (ICC; New York: Charles Scribner’s sons, 1910), p. 246.

⁷ Herman Gunkel, *Genesis*, trans. Mark E. Biddle (Mercer University Press: Macon, Georgia, 1997),p.166.

⁸ Ovid, *Metam* 7.614-630.

⁹ Ben Sirach for example in his praise to wisdom says: “Like a terebinth I spread out my branches and my branches are glorious and graceful.” 24:16.

that a tree of great antiquity was looked upon as a “tree of life” or as being cosmic. The stump of the tree symbolized the “navel of the earth” and its top representing heaven. The tree served as a bridge between the human and divine spheres and became an area of divine–human encounter.¹⁰

Whereas, modern scholars speculated that the word *moreh* is related to an oracle, it appears that the Aramaic targumists interpreted *moreh* differently. The primary function of this interpretation was to remove any association of Abraham with tree worshipping. Therefore, Targum Neofiti 1 translates “the Plain of the Vision;” thus, the place named *Moreh* was understood by the targumists as connected with *mrph*, “vision,” or “*rph*,” to see.¹¹ Meanwhile Ps.-J translated *moreh* as ‘plain that had been pointed out,’ Evidently basing translation is based on the verb הורה ‘to point, give direction.’

Alternatively, medieval commentators such as Ibn Ezra, Radak and Ramban gave *moreh* a different interpretation. According to them, *Moreh* is the name of a person who owned the plain. While, Rashi interprets here: “until the plain of *Moreh*-That is *Shechem*. He showed him Mount Gerizim and Mount Ebal, where Israel accepted the oath of Torah.” It appears that Rashi relates אֵלֹן homeilectically with אָלָה oath and מוֹרָה with Torah.

B. Plains of *Moreh*

In Sotah 32a the Mishnah comments that the plain of *Moreh* (Gen 12:6) is identical with the plains of *Moreh* (אֵלֹנֵי מֶרֶה) in Deut 11:30 which appear in the plural form. The place was in the vicinity of Mount Gerizim and Mount Ebal near the city of *Shechem*. The mountains mentioned here are connected with the blessings on Mount Gerizim and curses on Mount Ebal. As in his translation in Genesis, Tagum Onkols and Jerome translated מִישַׁרָא *plain*, for אֵלֹן. Ps-Jon has “on the side of the vision of Mamre,” and Neofiti “the

¹⁰ Nahum M. Sarna, *The JPS Torah Commentary: Genesis* (The Jewish Publication Society: Philadelphia, 1989), p.91.

¹¹ F. Stummer, “Convallis Mambre und verwandets,” *JPOS* 12(1932):6-12.

Plains of the Vision". Interestingly Ps-Jon translated here instead of Moreh Mamre. We must remember that Mamre belongs to the Hebronite tradition and not the Shechemite tradition (Gen 13:18). The plural elonê which appears in our verse is usually combined with Mamre (13:18; 14:13; 18:1). Cassuto suggested that the avoidance of translating the word as tree came to prevent the reader from connecting the narrative with the Samaritan belief in the holiness of a certain local tree.¹² Similarly, the Sifre uses the term "plain" and not the specific terebinth. This might reflect the Sifre's interpretation that all references to this place are to the city of Shechem.¹³

Tigay, claims that the place elonê Moreh was named for Canaanite diviners who once gave oracles at the trees. According to him, "Moreh" probably means "oracle giver".¹⁴ Driver says that Moreh is not a proper name but an appellative. The verb הורה indicates "direction" given by priests who gave answers to those who came to consult the oracle.¹⁵ Weinfeld points to the fact that the author of Deuteronomy prohibits the planting of sacred trees at the temple (16:21); therefore, he intentionally changed "the oak" into "oaks" to indicate that it was not a sacred tree but: "a grove or a small wood serving some aesthetic or practical purpose (for shade or the like)."¹⁶ Interestingly, The Samaritan text and the LXX have the singular oak here.

C. Land mark and sheltered places

It is more likely however, that אֵלוֹן מֹרֶה elon Moreh served as land mark since the Bible tells us that: "Abraham passed through the land

¹² U. Cassuto, *A Commentary on The Book of Genesis*, trans. Israel Abraham (Magnes Press: Jerusalem, 1964), p. 326.

¹³ Reuven Hammer, *Sifre A Tannaitic Commentary on the Book of Deuteronomy* (Yale University Press: New Haven, 1986), pp. 113-112.

¹⁴ Jeffery H. Tigay, *The JPS Torah Commentary: Deuteronomy* (The Jewish Publication Society: Philadelphia, 1996), p. 117.

¹⁵ S. R. Driver, *Deuteronomy* (ICC; Edinburgh: T&T. Clark, 1951), p. 134.

¹⁶ Moshe Weinfeld, *Deuteronomy 1-11* (AB 5; Doubleday: New York, 1991), p. 453.

as far as the site of Shechem, at the terebinth of Moreh.”(Gen 12:6). By mentioning the tree the Bible gives us the precise location of Abraham’s dwelling. Indeed in verse 8 we read “From there he moved on to the hill country east of Bethel and pitched his tent, with Bethel on the west and Ai on the east.” Moreover, there isn’t any hint that Abraham was engaged in tree worship. The only religious act that the Bible describes in our text is the building of an altar. However, we must stress that this act followed the theophany. Abraham built the altar in gratitude for the promise of the land. As Sarna pointed out the patriarchs do not take part in existing cults; they always built new altars and used them.¹⁷ Similarly Augustine Pagolu says that Abraham’s building an altar: “suggests that there had been no altar beforehand, which in turn suggests that there also been no shrine there.”¹⁸

Scholars who point to tree worshiping base it on ancient tradition that existed among the other nations and to the etymology of the word Moreh. However, Moreh can be interpreted in different ways as we see with the Targumim. It is noteworthy to point to Gen 22:2 which speaks of the Land of Moriah as the site of Isaac’s binding. Thus, can we say that people addressed the mountain in the land of Moriah for an oracle?

In the Book of Genesis the patriarchs are depicted as nomads who dwelled in tents and were constantly on the move, traveling for fresh pasture. Throughout their travels, they wandered to sites in the central mountain region and the Negev. Due to the climate, they traveled to the northern part of the Negev in the winter and spring and to the central mountain area in the summer and autumn.¹⁹ From a geographical point of view, it appears that the patriarchs limited their migration to the area between Dotan and Beer Sheba, and thus avoided the northern part of the country, the coastal plain, and the Jordan River. Those parts of the land they avoided were extensively

¹⁷ Nahum M. Sarna, *The JPS Torah Commentary: Genesis*, p.92.

¹⁸ Augustine Pagolu, *The Religion of the Patriarchs*, p. 58.

¹⁹ S.Yevin, “Beer-Sheba the Patriarchal City,” *Zion* 20 (1953): 120(Hebrew).

populated with fortified urban centers.²⁰ We must remember that the patriarchs were heads of small nomadic groups that had to avoid military confrontations. On the other hand, the central mountain area and the Negev were less populated and, consequently, without a dominant power.²¹ A closer observation of the path of their migration reveals some relevant information. The patriarchs stayed close to the cities, but they did not enter the cities or live in them unless compelled by danger of famine.²² The patriarchs stayed close to urban centers where they could barter for the domestic necessities they required.

M.B. Rowton pointed out already that in the 2nd millennium B.C that the hapiru bands were very active in areas with considerable woodland, rocky land and roving nomadic tribes. According to him it was because it was very difficult to control effectively this kind of land with the military equipment available in antiquity.²³ It is not the purpose of this article to answer the long scholarly dispute: Are the hapiru and Hebrew related? However, we can see that Abraham follows a similar path. Abraham also lived in rocky areas of the central mountain which had considerable woodland and was less populated. We must remember that there was much more woodland in the second millennium B.C.E than there is today. The rocky area

²⁰ S. M. Paul and W. G. Dever, eds., *Biblical Archaeology* (New York: Quadrangle/New York Times Book Co., 1973), p. 8.

²¹ G. E. Wright, *Biblical Archaeology* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1957), p. 47; S.

S. Yeivin, "Studies in the Patriarchal Period," *Beth Mikra* 16 (1963): 19 (Hebrew).

²² M. Haran, "Descriptive Outline of the Religion of the Patriarchs," in *Oz Le David*,

eds. Y. Kaufman et al. (Jerusalem: Kiryat-sefer, 1964), p. 50 (Hebrew); Paul and Dever,

eds., *Biblical Archaeology*, p. 8.

²³ M. B. Rowton, "The Topological Factor in the Habiru Problem," in *Studies in Honor of Benno Landsberger on his Seventy-Fifth Birthday*, ed. H. G. Güterbock and T. Jacobsen, (Assyriological Studies 16; Chicago: University of Chicago, 1965), pp. 375-387.

with its woodland provided good cover. Thus it is also possible that Abraham lived next to trees because of safety reasons.

3. A. *Terebinths of Mamre*

In addition to the terebinth of Moreh, we read in the Book of Genesis about Terebinths of Mamre. In two passages אֵלֹנֵי מַמְרֵה elonê Mamre appears as a name for Abraham's dwelling place (Gen13:18; 18:1); which was located at Hebron (13:18). While the third passage Gen 14:13 makes reference to אֵלֹנֵי מַמְרֵה with the personal name "Mamre the Amorite , brother of Eshcol and Aner. The LXX translated all three of these verses as 'oak of Mamre' (τὴν δρῦν τὴν Μαμβρη) where the oak is named Mamre, in the singular form. Also, in the Peshita it was translated in a singular form בלוטא blwth and in Arabic بلوط is an oak.²⁴ The singular oak appears also in the Testament of Abraham as the dwelling place of Abraham (1:2). While, Ramban in his commentary on Gen 14:6 says that the correct translation of מַמְרֵה אֵלֹנֵי should be 'the oaks of Mamre' in the plural.

The Targuim on the other hand did not translate the word tree. Thus, in Targum Pseudo- Jonathan we find בחזוי ממרה "in the vision of Mamre," a place you can see from afar as a plain place. Nf has "the plain of the Vision". Oneklos, translates all three verses as "plain of Mamre". In Midrash Rabbah 42 we find two views, one of R. Judah who translates plain of Mamre, while R. Nehemiah translates "palace of Mamre". The translation of 'plain' may be based on the similarity to the Greek word αὐλῶν which means plain. Ginsberg speculated that in Hebrew existed a word אַלֹן and in Ugaritic אֵלֹן which means plain. According to him, the word was known to the Jews of Palestine; however, it doesn't appear in the Bible with this meaning.²⁵

²⁴ See also Gen. 35:8 were the Hebrew אֵלֹן render in NF as blwth; cf. Gen. R. 15,1.

²⁵ H. L. Ginsberg, "Ba'lu and his Brethren," *JPOS* 16(1936):142.

As to modern scholars it was de Vaux who claimed that a syncretistic cult was practiced there, therefore, the place is not mentioned in the Bible outside of the Book of Genesis. Whenever the place is mentioned it seems to be deliberately obscured. According to him, the plural in the MT, “the Oaks of Mamre,” represents an attempt “to water down the superstitious veneration of a particular tree.” Thus the singular version is the older reading.²⁶ However, as we shall see below, it appears that it was translated “oak,” in the singular form, because in the later period people would point at a certain oak as Abraham’s oak. It was Augustine Pagolu who pointed out correctly that the growth of legends around Mamre does not prove that the place was sacred during the patriarchal period. In addition he says there is no archeological evidence of occupation at Mamre in the first half of the second millennium.²⁷

B. Mamre the Amorite

We already mentioned that in Gen 14:13 Mamre appears as a personal name, Mamre the Amorite. Lipiński suggested to read 14:13 “he (i.e., Abraham) was dwelling at the Amorite sanctuary of Mamre;” thus Mamre can be a divine name or epithet “the (fatted) calf”- *mamrēc* being a toponymic form, **ma-mrīc*, derived from S. Canaanite *mērīc* “fatted calf.”²⁸ Arbeitman, on the other hand, says that the name *mamre* is a Hebrew representation of the Hittite *mu-mar*, meaning friendship, peaceful relations, alliance”.²⁹ He also points to the associations of Hittites within the Hebron area (Gen 23). The Hittite *miu-mar* is semantically identical to Hebron “place of ally confederate”. His conclusion is that the author of Genesis 14

²⁶ Roland de Vaux, *Ancient Israel*, trans. John Mchugh (Darton, Longman & Todd: London, 1961), p. 292.

²⁷ Augustine Pagolu, *The Religion of the Patriarchs*, p.60.

²⁸ Lipiński, E. “CAnaq-Kiryat cArbac-Hebron et ses sanctuaries tribaux VT 24(1974):41-55.

²⁹ Yoël. L. Arbeitman, “Mamre,” *ABD* 4(1992):492.

later personified the name but the original tradition was “(Abraham) was dwelling at the Amorite sanctuary of Alliance”.³⁰

The name Mamre is a non- Semitic name and does not appear outside of Genesis. In Gen 14:13, 24, we read that Mamre was Abraham’s ally. Rashi says that Mamre was the name of the owner. Similarly, Westerman says Mamre is the name of a person in Gen 14:13, 24.³¹ However, according to the Ramban, whenever the Torah mentions Mamre alone, not with the plain of Mamre, as in 23:19 and 35:27, it is another name of a city (Hebron). Indeed Eusebius in the Onomasticon says that Mambre is Chebron where Abraham’s tomb is.³² Similarly, Jerome says that Mambre is Chebron, beside which Abraham was buried with Isaac and Jacob. As Eusebius, he says it was called Mambre for one of the friends of Abraham.³³ Most likely, Mamre was the name of an important family and the name was given to the city or to one of its quarters.

C. Mamre in History

From testimonies of historians, we read that the place was considered a holy place through the centuries. The Jewish historian Josephus mentioned a very ancient tree north west of Hebron that was famous in the Second Temple times.³⁴ He calls this tree “Ogyges,” who was the mythical king of Athens said to have survived the flood that destroyed the human race. Hence, Josephus mentioned Ogyges in order to emphasize the antiquity of Abraham. Indeed, in another statement, he said that about three-fourths of a mile from the city of Hebron stood a huge terebinth tree since the creation of the world. The author of *Itinerarium Burdigalense* 333

³⁰ Ibid, p.493.

³¹ Claus Westermann, *Genesis 12-36*, p. 181.

³² The Onomasticon by Eusebius of Caesarea, trans. G.S.P. Freeman-Grenville (Carta: Jerusalem, 2003), p. 70.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ *Wars* 4.533; *Ant* 1.186

A.D mentions the tree under which Abraham sat and dug his well, spoke with the angels and ate food with them.³⁵

It was under this famous tree that the sale of Jewish slaves took place. There Hadrian sold the captives of the Bar Kokhba War into slavery. In the Talmud and Midrash, the site of Mamre is mentioned as Butnah(Butnan), a site of the trade fair for slavery.³⁶ It was forbidden to take part in this fair and it was considered idolatry. It was Constantine who ordered the destruction of the pagan temple next to the oak tree and instead a beautiful basilica was built. During the Crusades period, many pilgrims visited the tree and it was customary to hold the Feast of the Trinity connecting it to the feast that Abraham had with the three angels. According to the Chronicles of Jerahmeel the wood of the tree was used for medicinal purposes because it was believed that the usage of it prevented any illness.³⁷

The pagan cult which was developed through the ages at elonê Mamre was the main reason why the Aramaic translators avoided translating the word tree. This was done in order to remove any association of Abraham with the pagan cult. The “Oak of Abraham” was venerated and many popular legends were ascribed to it. Many legends grew as a result of the association of Biblical Historical figures with different trees. With the passing of time the trees were thought to be sacred. Since people pointed to a certain oak as the oak of Abraham, the translators followed a similar path and translated it in the singular form, Oak of Mamre, and not in the plural as it should be.

D. Land mark for dwelling and Shade

Reading Gen 13:18;14:13;18:1 shows that Mamre was Abraham’s dwelling place. Therefore, we read in the Hebrew Bible: “and came

³⁵ *Itinerary from Bordeaux to Jerusalem*, trans. Aubrey Stewart (London: Adelphi, 1887), p. 27.

³⁶ TJ. AV. Zar. 1:4 38d; Gen. R. 47:10.

³⁷ *The Chronicles of Jerahmeel*, trans. M.Gaster (Ktav: New York, 1971), p.78.

to dwell (וַיֵּשֶׁב) at the terebinths of Mamre”(13:18); “The Lord appeared to him by the terebinths of Mamre ; he was sitting(יָשָׁב) at the entrance of the tent as the day grew hot.”(18:1); while in 14:13 “who was dwelling (שָׁכַן) at the terebinths of Mamre the Amorite”. In the first two verses, the Hebrew Bible uses the root יָשַׁב which means to sit, remain, or dwell. In 14:13 the Hebrew Bible uses the word שָׁכַן which means to camp or to sit in a place. One of the derivatives of the root is שָׁכֵן , which means neighbor; thus, the narrative comes to tell us that Abraham was dwelling in the neighborhood of Mamre the Amorite, the brother of Eshkol and Aner. From the three occurrences of Mamre in the Book of Genesis only 13:18 refers to Mamre as a place of worship, but this is after God appeared to Abraham. Here we read that Abraham built an altar to God. As we mentioned before, this was the pattern in the book of Genesis, following the theophany we find the building of an altar to commemorate the event.

According to 18:1 the Oak of Mamre gave shade to Abraham. In a later legend we read that the Oak of Mamre gives shade to the righteous but withdraws its cover from the unrighteous.³⁸ Travelers were resting at midday in shade of the tree, as we read about the angels who came to visit Abraham (Gen 18:4, 8); similarly we read about the man of God who was sitting under the *terebinth* (I Kgs 13:14). As we know, the oak is among the best shade trees in the land of Israel. It stands as tall as high as 20-25 feet, with a thick trunk and heavy branches. As we pointed out before, the book of Deuteronomy and other biblical texts condemn the places of worship “on the hills, under every verdant tree” (Deut 12:2; I Kgs 14:23; 2 Kgs 16:4; 17:10; Jer 2:20; Ezek 6:13; Hos 4:13).³⁹ However, careful reading of these verses reveals that there isn’t any tree worshipping in those texts. What the Bible tells us is that the Israelites worshiped other Gods on mountains and under trees. The reason for choosing trees as the site of a sanctuary was because of the cool shade offered by a densely leafed tree. Indeed in Hos 4:13 we read: “They sacrifice

³⁸ Zohar 1.102b.

³⁹ According to Winton Thomas תחת כל עץ רענן the reference is to a luxuriant tree thick with leaves. See: D. Winton Thomas, “ Some Observations on the Hebrew Word רַעֲנָן,” *VTS* 16(1967):387-397.

on the mountaintops, and offer on the hills, under oaks, poplars, and terebinths, whose shade is so pleasant.” The trees that are mentioned in our verse are not fruit bearing trees, they were chosen because their shade is good; thus they were deemed to be a proper setting for the worship of idols. According to Wolff “the shade of the trees is praised because it increases the pleasure of the sacrificial meals.”⁴⁰ He also added that the trees’ shadows served the other activities namely the sex rites. Keel claims that ‘the shadow’ of trees favored sexuality, eroticism and fecundity. According to him the trees in Canaan: “signaled an intense presence of mother earth blessings, to have sex under a tree meant to participate in her blessing and fecundity.”⁴¹ He sees the verse from Hos 4:12-13 as the oldest example of polemic against tree cult.⁴²

4. *Tamarisk*

A. The different interpretations of Eshel

In Gen 21:33, we read that Abraham planted *eshel* (אֶשֶׁל) at Beer-sheba and invoked the name of the Lord, the Everlasting God. The *eshel* אֶשֶׁל is also mentioned in I Sam 22:6; 31:13. In Arabic the tamarisk is called *athl* أثل which corresponds to the biblical eshel; thus it is probably one of the Tamarisk trees, namely Tamarisk aphylla or to another species of the genus. The LXX translated that Abraham planted a field (ἄρουραν), the Greek word represented an area of agricultural land as 100 square cubits.⁴³ This translation came to remove suspicion that Abraham had planted an item associated with pagan worship. Symmachus translated a “plantation,” Aquila a thicket. While in Ps-J and Neofiti 1, and Frg.

⁴⁰ Hans Walter Wolff, *Hosea*, trans. by Gary Stansell (Fortress Press: Philadelphia, 1974), p. 86.

⁴¹ Othmar Keel, *Goddesses and Trees, New Moon and Yahweh*, (JSOTSup 261; Sheffield Academic Press: England, 1998), p.54

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Herodotus II.14; Philo, *De Plant.*75; Robert Hayward, “Abraham as Proselytizer at Beer-Sheba in the Targums of the Pentateuch,” *JJS* 49(1998):25-26.

Tg. on Gen 21:33, we read that Abraham planted an orchard or garden. Ps-J added to the text 'and in it he prepared food and drink for those who went and came.' While Targum Neofiti 1 says: 'and within it gave food to the passerby.' This edition of the text was motivated by the understanding of the Hebrew word אֶשֶׁל. Accordingly, it became acrostic of the words אָכִילָה eating ; שָׁתִּיהָ drinking; and לוֹוִיָּה escorting and came to portray Abraham as a model of hospitality.

A different interpretation to the word אֶשֶׁל is found in Gen. Rab . 54:6 : "R. Judah said, *Eshel* means orchard, the word meaning "ask" (she'al) for whatever you wish, figs, grapes or pomegranates. R. Nehemiheah said: *Eshel* means "an inn," the word connoting, ask whatever you desire, meat, wine, or eggs.⁴⁴ Allison pointed out that instead of the people asking for the fruits of Abraham's orchard or for meals prepared at Abraham's inn, it would be easier to associate the asking with the tree itself. Therefore, a contributor or Testament of Abraham associated Abraham אֶשֶׁל with שָׂאֵל thus Abraham planted a tree that responds to questions, i.e. an oracle.⁴⁵ To bolster his study he points to Ezek 21:26 where שָׂאֵל is used in consulting an oracle and in Hos 4:12 consulting a tree or wood. However a question should be raised can someone plant a holy tree?

B. The Testament of Abraham

Like the legends that were developed around elonê Mamre, we also find an interesting testimony in the Testament of Abraham about the eshel. In spite of its title "testament" this book exhibits only a few traits of testimony genre, and it is more related to the apocalyptic dramas. It is believed by scholars that the book was composed between 2nd century B.C.E up to 6th century C.E. In chapter 1 we read that God sent Michael to prepare Abraham for his upcoming death. The archangel appeared in the field as human to Abraham and was invited to Abraham's house (ch.2). On the way home, Abraham

⁴⁴ See also Sotah 10a.

⁴⁵ Dale C. Allison, Jr. *The Testament of Abraham* (Walter de Gruyter, Berlin, 2003), pp.111-112.

understands the language of the tree. According to the Long Recension, it was a cypress tree, while the Short Recension mentions a tamarisk. Abraham hears the tamarisk tree with its three hundred and thirty one branches (the Hebrew אשל by Gematria is 331) singing a song about some misfortune (3:3). Tears fall from his eyes as he was washing the feet of the archangel. Michael also weeps, his tears turning to pearls, which Abraham catches hiding them under his cloak.

Trees don't speak in the Hebrew Bible. We find trees that speak in the form of a fable. Thus, in Judg 9:8-15, we read Jotham's poetic speech about the trees that looked for a tree to rule over them. The crown was offered to different trees and each tree apart of the last one refused. In 2Kgs 14:9 we read that Jehoash of Israel sent back this message to the King Amaziah of Judah: "The thistle in Lebanon sent this message to the cedar in Lebanon, 'Give your daughter to my son in marriage.' But a wild beast in Lebanon went by and trampled down the thistle." In addition, we have several verses in a poetic form where the meadows and trees are praising God (Ps 65:14; 96:12; 148:9; Isa 35:1-2; 44:23; 55:12; 1Chron 16:33). A similar description is also found in the Talmud Hag 14b in the story about R. Johanan b. Zakkai. Legends were developed about the trees of Eden as being able to speak. Thus in the treatise Aboth d. R. Nathan we read that when the serpent tried to touch the Tree of Knowledge to prove that God's prohibition was unnecessary, the Tree spoke and said: 'Villain, don't touch me' and in addition, quoted a verse from Ps 36:12 "Let not the foot of arrogance come upon me, nor the hand of the wicked shake me".⁴⁶ Legend is also found in Targum Sheni on Esther, where we read about several trees that spoke and gave their reason why Haman should not be hanged upon them.⁴⁷ The story in some aspect is very similar to the Jotham's fable.

⁴⁶ *The Fathers According to Rabbi Nathan*, translation and commentary by Anthony J. Saldarini, S.J. (Leiden : E. J. Brill, 1975), chapter 1, p.33

⁴⁷ *The Two Targums of Esther*, translated, with Apparatus and Note by Bernard Grossfeld (Liturgical Press: Collegeville Minnesota, 1991), chap 7, pp.181-183.

C. Place of Judgment and Burial

Tamarisk is also mentioned in 1Sam 22:6 where we read: "Saul was then in Gibeah, sitting under tamarisk tree on the height." (22:6). In contrast to Genesis where Targum Jonathan translates eshel for "orchard," it here translates eshel as tamarisk. The LXX is consistent and here translates eshel as a field (ἄρουραν). A similar description to our verse is also found in 1Sam 14:2, where we read: "Now Saul was staying on the outskirts of Gibeah, under the pomegranate tree of Migron." In Jud 4:5 we read that the prophetess Deborah, who was judging Israel, would sit under the 'palm of Deborah' as the people of Israel came up unto her judgment. The verb yāšabh (sit) is used in the Bible in the sense of presiding as Judge (1Kgs 21:8; Isa 28:6; Ps 9:7). It is unlikely that the author describes the prophetess as having her house or tent beneath a holy tree as some scholars speculated.⁴⁸ This description of sitting and judging people was prevalent during the period of the Judges and early monarchical period. Later however, we read that the kings were sitting in their palaces on the throne of Justice (1Kgs 7:7-8). King Saul, like the prophetess Deborah, was sitting under a tree to judge the people of Israel. Indeed, in Gen R. 54:6 which we mentioned earlier we read: R. 'Azariah said in the name of R. Judah: Eshel means a court of law, as in the verse, *Now Saul was visiting in Gibeah under the eshel in Ramah.*

In 1Sam 31:11-13 we read about the burial of King Saul and his sons. According to the story, the people of Jabesh-gilead removed the bodies of Saul and his sons and then burned them, burying the bones under the tamarisk tree in Jabesh. As in 1 Sam 22:6 Targum Jonathan translates here tamarisk for eshel, while the LXX, field (ἄρουραν). Interestingly, in the parallel text of 1Chron10:11-12, there is no mention of the burning of the bodies. Here we read that they buried the bones, but this time it was under an oak tree. According to McCarter terebinth is a "far more frequently mentioned

⁴⁸ C.F. Burney, *The Book of Judges* (Ktav: New York, 1970), p.86

tree and therefore less likely have been original to the account.”⁴⁹ Burial under a tree is also mention in Gen 35:8. Deborah, Rebekah’s nurse died and was buried under the oak below Bethel and it was named Allon-bacuth, which is interpreted to mean “the oak of weeping”. Gunkel pointed to fairy tales and legends in which the soul of the dead dwells in such trees.⁵⁰

According to Keel: “since the dead are said to return to the womb whence they came (Job 1.21; Sir 40.1; Ps 90.3,5 cf. Gen 1.11-12;Ps 139.15), the trees, at least in these two passages, are related to the mother earth.”⁵¹ However, it is more likely that Deborah, Rachel’s nurse and King Saul and his sons were buried under a tree because trees served as a memorial to the dead. Genesis 35 that records the death of Deborah recounts also the death of Rachel. Interestingly, we read that Jacob set up a pillar, a stone memorial marker over her grave (v.20). In contrast, there is no pillar over Deborah’s grave. Instead, her memory was kept alive by the oak of weeping, which her grave was beneath. The bones of Saul and his sons were buried first under the tamarisk which served as memorial to them. Later, however, we read that King David took the bones of Saul and his son Jonathan and gave them an honorable burial. King David reburied them in the family grave (2 Sam 21:14). Even today there is a custom in the state of Israel in which trees are planted for preserving the memory of the dead. There is also a possibility that the trees helped people to identify the burial site. Indeed, in the story of the purchase of the cave of Machpelah by Abraham, for a burial site for his wife Sarah, we read that he purchased the cave and all the trees around the field (Gen 23:17). Specifications of trees in land sale were common in ancient contracts at all periods. Indeed, the Babylonian bill of sale listed trees along property.⁵² From the second temple period we read that a person who purchases a field with trees in it, had a claim for

⁴⁹ P. Kyle McCarter, *I Samuel* (AB 8; Doubleday: Garden City, New York, 1980), p. 442.

⁵⁰ Hermann Gunkel, *Genesis*, p.368.

⁵¹ Othmar Keel, *Goddesses and Trees, New Moon and Yahweh*, p.49.

⁵² Eberhard Schrader, *Keilinschriftliche bibliothek* (Berlin: Reuther & Reichard, 1889-1915),iv.101,161,165.

the ground around it.⁵³ Thus it is possible that burial under trees served as a land mark for the burial and claim of ownership.

D. Planting a Tree.

Genesis 21:33 is the only place where Abraham plants a tree. We are not told why Abraham planted the tree. According to Gunkel, Abraham is a cult founder, but we should ask 'can one plant a holy tree'?⁵⁴ According to Benno Jacob the reason for the planting of the tree was that "The tree shall be a permanent memorial of the event."⁵⁵ When Abraham planted the tree he saw it as a marker for the place where he called on his God. Tree planting is similar to altar building and marked the foundation of the great shrine of Beersheba. However, there is no evidence for any pervious sanctity of the place. The Patriarch does not use any cultic objects. According to Radak, Abraham planted the tree next to the well as a testimony that the well belonged to him, it was a public demonstration of his undisputed ownership of the well. We have to remember that trees were often used to mark the boundary between fields belonging to different owners. By planting the tree Abraham was claiming the territory, for which he had made an agreement with Abimelech as rightfully his.

The *eshel* that Abraham planted was probably *Tamarix aphylla* which is found in the Negev and not *Tamarix pentadra* which is common to the Sinai desert. It is a tall tree that requires very little water and suitable to the sandy soil of the northern Negev desert area. It is noted for its cool shade and ability to withstand heat and dry spells. In addition, it was used as a fuel for cooking. The Bedouin planted this tree because of its soft branches, which the flocks eat. Thus it is possible that Abraham in addition to his demonstration of ownership planted the tree for shade, for fuel, and food for the flocks. It is interesting to note that Abraham's first stop in the Promise land was by a tree (Gen12:6). In 13:18 He built an altar by

⁵³ Baba Bathra 82b; Mish. Baba Bathra 5:4.

⁵⁴ Hermann Gunkel, *Genesis*, p. 233.

⁵⁵ B. Jacob, *The First Book of The Bible: Genesis*, trans. Ernest I. Jacob and Walter Jacob (Ktav: New York, 1974), p.141.

the tree of Mamre. He lived near trees (14:13), and in 18:1 he entertained Yahweh under the trees. Finally here he plants a tree.

5. Conclusions

The terebinth of Moreh, terebinths of Mamre, and Tamarisk were land marks which marked the place of habitat of the Patriarch Abraham. In ancient times trees were often used to mark the boundary between fields belonging to different owners. The rocky area with its woodland also provided good cover. Thus Abraham lived in area which had a considerable amount of trees for safety reasons. In addition, trees also had some other practical usage such as shade, fuel for cooking, or food for the flock. People were also buried under trees which served as a memorial to the dead as a land mark and as a sign of ownership. With the passing of time, and because of the association with important biblical figures, the places became sacred. Review of the Book of Genesis shows that there is no trace of the patriarchs' engaging in any religious rites at these trees. It is only in later periods that we read about the Israelites who worshiped Yahweh 'on high mountains, on hills under any spreading tree (Deut 12:2; 1Kgs 14:23; Jer 2:20). It was this late Bible reading and later traditions which associated Abraham and sacred trees. Thus, not surprisingly the Aramaic translators avoided translating the word "tree." Instead they give it a different meaning in order to avoid any association of Abraham with paganism.

Dr Shaul Bar

Breaching the 'Silence' on Early Christianity and Military Service: Paul and the Praetorian Guard.

Dr Doreen Hartland

ABSTRACT

The New Testament records, accepted as authoritative by the Church which emerged from the Christian movement, include soldiers' encounters with the four leaders of the movement – John the Baptist, Jesus of Nazareth, Peter and Paul. There has been no convincing explanation of the subsequent 'silence' to these encounters, which is said to stretch from c. AD50 to AD170. The article takes the view that if a correlation can be shown between the key centres of Christianity and military locations along the Jerusalem-Rome axis, then it can be posited that the stories in the New Testament represent a continuing process of military interest in Christianity into the 2nd century AD. The first part of the article sets the scene and reasons for this view: the second part investigates the specific case of the Praetorian Guard through examining the significance of the mention of 'πραιτωρίον' in Philippians 1:13.

INTRODUCTION

Historical silences are notoriously hard to penetrate and that regarding early Christianity and military service is no exception. Had this silence not led to sincere, but sometimes dogmatically, held convictions that there is an inherent incompatibility between the two parties and/or that early church was therefore pacifist, perhaps the question concerning their interaction might not be so controversial today in some circles. Three comments spanning the twentieth century illustrate the obstacles to breaching the silence. In 1925 Cadoux maintained that "after the at best doubtful cases of Cornelius and the Philippian gaoler in Acts, we have no reliable evidence of any Christian soldiers until we come to the reign of Marcus Aurelius."⁵⁶ Nearly 40 years later, Windass emphasised the lack of

56 C.J. Cadoux, *The Church and The World*. (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1925). 276. However, elsewhere in his monographs he writes: In discussing Cornelius "... the existence even of these few cases makes it possible that from the earliest times, there may have been soldier converts in the church" *The Early Christian Attitude to War*, 229. In *Church and the World*, 276.

“authentic evidence for the existence of a single Christian soldier after that of the New Testament until about AD 170”⁵⁷ Thirty years later Hunter unequivocally writes:

No Christian writer of the first two centuries actually deals directly with the question of the permissibility of warfare and military service for Christians. Furthermore this silence on the question corresponds to an absence of evidence that Christians actually participated in military service to any significant extent prior to the closing years of the second century. In short, there is no firm evidence either of participation in the army or of discussion of military service before the end of the second century.⁵⁸

These views are compounded by Wright’s statement that:

...we do not know very much and, failing major new discoveries, can never know very much about the first Christian century. It is desperately easy to cover over this ignorance with theory, to make hypothesis do where history will not.⁵⁹

Yet if interaction did cease after the conversion of the Philippian jailer c. AD50, but was prevalent again by AD170, certain questions arise. Specifically, a convincing answer is required to Swift’s comment.

Moreover, if the military profession were intrinsically incompatible with the Christian faith, it would be difficult

written six years later it is stated: “At the same time, the precedents recorded in the NT, apart from any other considerations, compel us to admit the possibility of the existence of Christian soldiers at any period subsequent to the early Apostolic age.

57 Stanley Windass, *Christianity Versus Violence*. (London: Sheed and Ward, 1964), 10.

58 David G. Hunter, “The Christian Church and the Roman Army in the First Three Centuries.” M. E. Miller & B. N. Gingerich, eds., *The Church’s Peace Witness*. (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1994), 166.

59 N. T. Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God: Christian Origins and the Question of God*. (London: SPCK, 1992), 453.

to explain why John the Baptist said nothing about abandoning the service to the soldiers who came to him for advice (Luke 3:14) or why Peter had no reservations about baptising the centurion Cornelius (Acts 10) or why Paul was silent about the official responsibilities of the gaoler whom he converted at Philippi (Acts 16:27-34)⁶⁰

And if this attitude did change, answers are also needed as to when this happened and why. If a change of attitude can be shown, then, as there is no doubt whatsoever that Christianity and military service were again deemed compatible by the later decades of the second century AD, the when, how and why of a reversal of that change of attitude needs to be addressed.

It must be admitted that it would be an exercise in futility to try to answer these kinds of questions, firstly, because of the dearth of knowledge about the period in general. Helgeland bluntly states that “the lack of references to enlistment proves there is a lack of references to enlistment – nothing more.”⁶¹ Secondly, a recent history of early Christianity estimates that by the year AD100 there were only about 7-8000 Christians in the Roman Empire - about 0.01% of the population.⁶² To require evidence of numbers of soldiers converting to Christianity, when the same information is not being asked of other ruling, professional or occupational groups, thus seems spurious. Furthermore, according to the New Testament record, outside the trades/professions of the disciples and the various ruling authorities, only soldiers are stated as having significant encounters with all four of the leading figures in the early Christian movement – John the Baptist, Jesus, Peter and Paul. This in itself is remarkable if Davidson’s figures are taken as a general guide.

60 Louis Swift, *The Early Fathers on War and Military Service: Message of the Fathers of the Church*. (Collegeville, Minnesota: Michael Glazier, 1983), 19.

61 John Helgeland, “Christians & the Roman Army AD173-337.” *Church History* 43 (1974): 149-163, 150.

62 Ivor J. Davidson, *The Birth of the Church: From Jesus to Constantine AD30-312*. Vol.1 (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Books, 2004), 101. The ‘estimate’ is emphasised since calculations cannot be verified but the general sociological consensus is that adherents to Christianity grew by between 2.5% and 4% per annum. The base figure for calculation is 120 in cAD33 (Acts 1:15).

Finally, 'silence' does not mean a cessation of activity. Hopfe's comment aptly illustrates this statement.

Following Paul's departure for Rome from the port of Caesarea in AD60, there is a period of one hundred and thirty years of silence regarding the Christians of Caesarea. Surely the Christian community of the city was active and growing between 60 and 189 CE as its vitality in the third century demonstrates.⁶³

Thus, if by AD170, "the tide of conversion is rising and there are many converts in the Army", conversions must have started before this date. Since Roman soldiers served for a period of 20 years and some re-enlisted after this period or were 'called up' again as a reserve then such conversions could have occurred anytime up to 20-25 or more years before that date. Although at a much later date, the case of Julius the Veteran illustrates this point. He had re-enlisted and was subsequently martyred in the Diocletian persecution, having served for 27 years and "all the while I have worshipped in reverence the 'God who made heaven and earth' [a reference to Acts 4:24] and even up to this moment I openly serve him"⁶⁴

These general points serve as caveats to accepting that there is nothing to be gained by further investigation of a connection between early Christianity and military service. The New Testament does show that Christianity did make an impact on soldiers and further indications in the texts, for example, the military language used especially by Paul, suggest there is no sound reason for denying that the Movement continued to be of interest to soldiers.

63 Lewis M. Hopfe, "Caesarea Palaestinae as a Religious Centre," *ANRW* II.18:4 (1990): 2380-2411, 2400. Hopfe notes that as a result of the conversion of Cornelius in that city (Acts 10) "Christianity had a natural interest in Caesarea Maritima almost from the beginning of its history." (p2407). If that progress started with Cornelius and if it was continued by Philip (Acts 21:8), military exposure to Christianity cannot be denied.

64 Swift, *The Early Fathers on War and Military Service*, 76.

CENTRES OF CHRISTIANITY AND MILITARY LOCATIONS

The history of Christianity contained in the New Testament and accepted as authoritative by the Church which emerged from it, shows that the Movement did have an impact on soldiers through encounters with its leaders, with actual or potential salvific outcomes in all cases. Thus, the critical foundation of the argument that Christianity made an impact on soldiers from the outset of the Christian movement is evidence for the presence of soldiers in the areas where, according to the New Testament writers, John the Baptist, Jesus, the Apostles and Paul conducted their ministries. The degree of both possibility and probability therefore, depends on a correlation between the main centres of Christian activity and a military presence. Hence, this article will maintain that a different line of enquiry can breach the silence and provide an alternative perspective on interaction between early Christianity and military service.

The following maps [Fig. 1 and Fig. 2] clearly illustrate the presence of military forces in places where the Gospel was preached and took root,⁶⁵ while Kennedy's chart shows continuing military involvement in these areas.⁶⁶ A sketch of geographical correlations and epigraphical data, however, are insufficient *per se* to provide a strong argument for an interaction between Christianity and military service. Fortunately, there is a consensus that military personnel in the East were based in towns and interacted with the civilian populations. For example, Tacitus⁶⁷ attests to close connection between soldiers and civilians in Syria and the Pliny correspondence

65 Maps compiled from various sources including: J. J. Bimson et al, *New Bible Atlas*, (Leicester: Lion/IVP, 1985), 67; H. M. D. Parker, *The Roman Legions*, (London: Clarendon Press, 1928); R.K. Sherck, "Roman Galatia," *ANRW* II.7.2, (1980): 954-1052, 996; Wm. M. & A. Margaret Ramsay, "Roman Garrisons and Soldiers in Asia Minor," *JRS* Vol.18 (1928): 181-190, 184; M. Spiedel, "Legionaries from Asia Minor," *ANRW* II.7:2 (1980): 730-746.

66 David Kennedy, *The Military Contribution of Syria to the Roman Imperial Army*, Proceedings of a Colloquium held at Ankara in September 1988. Monograph No 11, BAR International Series 553(I), (1989), 242-3.

67 Tacitus, *Histories of Tacitus: An English Translation*, G. G. Ramsay, (London: John Murray, 1915), 2:80, 187. At Antioch, Mucianus, Vespasian's general was able to win over the Syrian legions to Vespasian's cause by asserting that Vitellius was going to bring German armies to Syria and transfer the Syrian legions to Germany. But "the provincials delighted in their accustomed intercourse with the soldiers, united with them, as many of them were, by ties of blood and friendship..." joined with the soldiers to prevent the Syrian legions being transferred to Germany.

to the same interaction.⁶⁸ Sociological studies also make reference to soldiers being part of the Gospel communities, with Esler making the most explicit statement about this for Luke's community concluding that "there is quite a body of evidence to suggest that there were Romans in Luke's community."⁶⁹ The first examples given are centurions – a reiteration of the point made earlier in that work that centurion figures in Luke-Acts are a "prototype of the government officials who will later show such interest in the Christian message."⁷⁰ Esler's claims are corroborated by Robbins who writes, "Luke-Acts is produced in a social location where a number of centurions are members of the Christian community ... not simply outsiders looking in."⁷¹ Figure 2 gives a military overview to Meeks' affirmation that even "if we limit ourselves to the evidence from the letters of Paul and his immediate associates, then, we find that the Pauline movement took root in at least four provinces of the Roman Empire: Galatia, Asia, Macedonia and Achaia."⁷² He adds that "the two Macedonian cities, Philippi and Thessalonica, that were so important to the Pauline mission were also important in the Roman scheme of control" and, significantly that the first colonists of Philippi included "a cohort of praetorians."⁷³

68 The Younger Pliny, *Correspondence*. E. G. Hardy. (London: Macmillan & Co., 1889), 296. Letter 100 speaks of "the soldiers and provincials vying with one another in loyal demonstrations" an unlikely contest if soldiers and civilians were kept at a distance from each other.

69 Philip F. Esler, *Community and Gospel in Luke-Acts: The Social and Political Motivations of Lukan Theology*. (Society for New Testament Studies) (Cambridge: C.U.P., 1987), 210. A general consensus is that Luke's works originated in Caesarea Maritima.

70 Esler, *Community & Gospel*, 37.

71 Vernon K. Robbins, "The Social Location of the Implied Author of Acts." Jerome H. Neyrey, ed., *The Social World of Luke-Acts. Models for Interpretation*. (Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, 1991), 329-330.

72 Wayne Meeks, *The First Urban Christians: The Social World of the Apostle Paul*. (New Haven/London: Yale University Press, 1983), 42.

73 Meeks, *The First Urban Christians*, 45

Fig. 1 Military Locations in Palestine from the time of Herod the Great



Map adapted from Bimson, J.J. et al. *New Bible Atlas*. (Leicester: Lion T.V.P. 1985) p67

- Key fortified cities
- ✕ Key fortresses
- ▲ Probable areas of John the Baptist's activity

Fig. 2. Key Centres of Christianity and Military Garrisons along the Jerusalem- Rome.

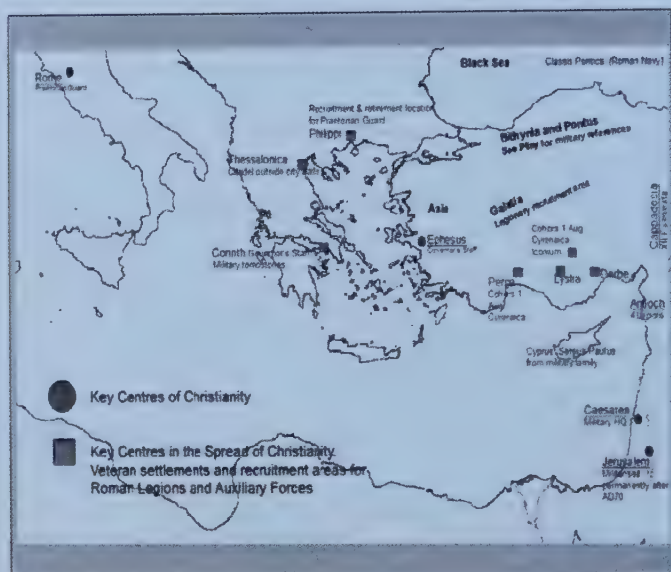


Fig. 3. Legionary Recruitment by area

Source. D. Kennedy. *The Military Contribution of Syria to the Roman Imperial Army*. Proceedings of a Colloquium held at Ankara in September 1988. Monograph No 11, BAR International Series 553(I) (1989) 235-243. pp243.

Eastern legionary recruits whose origins are known (after Forni 1953; 1974; Kennedy 1980:292

	Augustus to Gaius	Claudius to Nero	Flavians to Trajan	Hadrian to 3 rd century	TOTAL
Asia	3	2	4	5	14
Bithynia	3	0	30	6	39
Galatia	30	5	6	5	46
Pamphylia/ Pisidia	10	1	2	1	14
Pontus/ Cappadocia	4	4	2	0	10
Cilicia /Cyprus	2	0	0	11	13
Syria/ Palestina	5	3	51	54	113
Egypt	9	0	11	45	65
TOTAL	66	15	106	127	314

ROME

From this data it seems safe to conclude that if, a military presence, a Christian community and the circumstances which could result in military conversions, can be established, then there are reasonable grounds for maintaining that interaction between early Christianity and military service was an ongoing process even throughout the period of 'silence'. Fortunately, according to the available records, those elements existed side by side in Rome. The military presence in Rome is incontestable. The city was the undisputed, permanent base of the most *élite* unit in the Roman army – the Praetorian Guard; and also became the main centre for Western Christianity. Furthermore, Meeks' mention of the Praetorian Guard in association with Philippi, indicates that singular mention of the word *πραιτωρι* in a letter to the Philippians (1:13) can assume added nuances. An investigation into Paul's use of the term, firstly, can be used to assess what impact Paul's imprisonment could have had on his military guards during that period and extending after his death. Secondly, it permits consideration of the fact that, in the Philippian context, a military connection can be established.

Modern commentaries are the obvious first choice of sources of information but are, unfortunately, less than helpful. For most, '*πραιτωρι*-' only "merits a brief word of explanation."⁷⁴ With the exception of Hendriksen, semantic and locational considerations determine the weighting given to the term. Discussion on whether the word means a 'building', 'place' or 'body of men', dominates the coverage. However, the consensus opinion emerging is that "Lightfoot's arguments", concluding that "Praetorium signifies not a place but a body of men",⁷⁵ "have never been overturned."⁷⁶ For Fee, this identification of the term as a 'body of men', leads to another important conclusion as it offers "the strongest kind of evidence for the Roman origins of the letter."⁷⁷ Both conclusions

74 Marcus Bockmuehl, "A Commentator's Approach to the 'Effective History' of Philippians," *JNT* 60 (1995): 57-88, 75.

75 J. B. Lightfoot, *The Epistles of St. Paul: Philippians*. (London: Macmillan & Co., 1883), 101.

76 Gordon D. Fee, *Paul's Letter to the Philippians*. (N.I.C.N.T.) (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1995), 113.

77 Gordon D. Fee, *Philippians*. (I.V.P. New Testament Commentary Series) (Leicester: I.V.P., 1999), 196.

find corroboration in Saddington's article. He cites Acts 28:16/Western text,⁷⁸ which refers to Paul being handed over to "ὁ στρατοπεδάρχος a term used for an administrator in the Praetorian Guard and adds "that Paul was initially handed over to him. Accordingly, on the present evidence, it seems likely that Paul was held by the Praetorian Guard."⁷⁹ Rapske⁸⁰ also assumes imprisonment by the Praetorian Guard in Rome and includes potential identification of this particular officer.⁸¹ Independently of this discussion, Speidel states that Julius, Paul's custodian, was "of a position and of a status that enabled him to deal with Roman officialdom in the capital"⁸² indicating this writer's acceptance of the Roman location of Paul's final incarceration. These sources thus establish a connection between a military establishment and the most potently effective Christian advocate of the age.

That connection is described by Bruce. "It was natural that the soldier (relieved by a comrade every four hours or so) should be a member of the imperial bodyguard. News about this extraordinary prisoner would naturally spread through the Praetorian barracks."⁸³ Bruce's words, quite unintentionally, substantiate a further observation from Rapske. In his extensive study of Roman criminal custodial practices, he concludes that Paul was accorded "an extremely casual form of military custody"⁸⁴ and "amazingly loose custody",⁸⁵ which nevertheless included the permanent presence of a guard to whom Paul was bound by the wrist by a light chain. In itself, the nature of the arrangements would have been remarkable.

78 ὁ ἑκατοντάρχος παρέδωκε τοὺς δεσμίους τ- στρατοπεδάρχ- τ- δὲ Παυλ- ἑπ'απ'η.

79 D. B. Saddington, "Roman Military and Administrative Personnel in the New Testament." ANRW II 26.3 (1996) 2409-2435, 2418.

80 Brian Rapske, *Paul In Roman Custody*. BAFCS Vol. 3 (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1994), 173-191.

81 Rapske, *Paul in Roman Custody*, 174-177. He concludes that the officer was probably the subordinate of the *praefectus praetorii* and, as the head administrator, would have been responsible for deciding the nature of Paul's custody.

82 Michael P. Speidel & A. Dimitrova-Milceva, "The Roman Army in Judaea under the Procurators: The Italian and the Augustan Cohorts in the Acts of the Apostles." *Ancient Society* 13-14 (1982-83): 233-240, 240.

83 F. F. Bruce, *Philipians*. (N.I.B.C.) (Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, 1988), 41.

84 Rapske, *Paul in Roman Custody*, 173.

85 Rapske, *Paul in Roman Custody*, 191.

This prisoner, who had appealed to Caesar, had arrived in the custody of a centurion with depositions from the governor of Judaea and the commander of the Antonia fortress in Jerusalem. His case had been heard before a king and his accusers had been among the leading Jewish élite. Yet Rapske affirms the Acts account that he was permitted to remain outside the barracks, with a single, regular-soldier guard and receive visitors at will.⁸⁶ Significantly, therefore, this reference in Philippians points to the only place where numerous soldiers, belonging to an undisputed, historically verifiable military ‘regiment’, are said to have been exposed to Christian preaching and teaching, which according to Acts lasted for two years.

The key question which then arises is: Did Paul’s preaching and teaching make an impact on soldiers? A clue is found in the words “εἰς προκοπὴν τοῦ εὐαγγελίου ἐλήλυθεν” in Philipians 1:12. If the gospel was simply a topic of conversation among the soldiers, why did Paul use the stronger (and more military) ‘προκοπὴν’? It bears the connotation of empirical progress rather than the spread of idle conversation. Taking verse 1:13 in isolation, it could be argued that the gospel had been the means by which the reason for Paul’s imprisonment had been made known to his guards. Yet, it is somehow inconceivable that Paul would boast about the gospel providing him with a personal advantage, i.e., he may have been treated more leniently because he was not seen as a violent and/or dangerous political prisoner. Verses 12 and 13 need to be taken together to make sense of the cause of Paul’s imprisonment and the resultant spreading of the gospel throughout the Praetorian ranks. It is therefore possible, that the use of ‘προκοπὴν’ in verse 12 was the safest way to inform his readers that his message had been effective. Support for closer attention to ‘προκοπὴν’ comes from Thielman who notes that the term “appears only in one other passage in the New Testament (1 Timothy 4:15).” Hence its appearance at the beginning and end of this section in Philippians “probably has deeper meaning than is readily apparent, especially in translation.”⁸⁷ Given

⁸⁶ Acts 28:16, 30.

⁸⁷ Frank Thielman, *Philippians*. (NIV Application Commentary) (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1995), 59.

the discussion of the military character of the language of Philippians, researched by Geoffrian and Kentz, Thielman's opinion merits consideration. Paul does not make any claims about conversions among his guards and it is possible to assume from this silence that there were no soldier converts. However, Paul does not mention every person converted under his ministry by name and there seems no good reason for making exceptions here. Given his situation he could not have explicitly claimed converts among soldiers or named them. To do so could have had serious repercussions for both Paul and his guards if the authorities were to view such conversions as subversion. Indeed, for the security of the soldiers themselves and for others in Caesar's household, wisdom dictated non-disclosure: their fates could subsequently have been linked to his.

A second clue is the mention of 'Καίσαρος οἰκίας' in Philippians 4:22. It is sometimes assumed that members of 'Caesar's household' included only civilians, freedmen and slaves. However, an unavoidable conclusion is that some soldiers must have been part of the "Καίσαρος οἰκίας" if the security of the imperial family was to be constantly monitored. It has been recorded, for example, that when during a meeting with a senator who had come to apologise for comments made in the Senate, Tiberias fell to the ground, the senator was nearly killed by the soldiers on duty, because they thought he had attacked the emperor.⁸⁸ It was also Tiberias, under the influence of the Praetorian Prefect, Sejanus, who brought the Guard into Rome and built new quarters for the unit,⁸⁹ an action which made the commanders of the Guards effective masters of the city.⁹⁰ While the vast majority of them would have been stationed in the city barracks, a detachment of trustworthy men would have been assigned specifically to the palace. When the peace-time activities of soldiers is considered, another intriguing possibility arises. While defence of the empire and emperor were the prime responsibilities of the army,

88 Brian Campbell, *The Roman Army, 31BC-AD339: A Sourcebook*. (New York / London: Routledge, 1994), 112.

89 Graham Webster, *The Roman Imperial Army of the First and Second Centuries*. 3rd ed. (London: A & C Black, 1998),

90 G. R. Watson, *The Roman Soldier*. (London: Thames and Hudson, 1969), 17.

McMullen's and Davies'⁹¹ studies show the wide variety of tasks performed by soldiers in all parts of the Empire. McMullen states that "soldiers did the jobs properly belonging to the civil service, and thus militarised government."⁹² He adds that "it can be said with something approaching certainty"⁹³ that the administrative and clerical staff of the highest government officials were drawn from the legions. Secretaries, accountants, scribes and paymasters would all come under this umbrella until the time of Diocletian, who, at the end of the 2nd century AD "is credited with separating military from civil office."⁹⁴ That members of the Praetorian Guard also had such skills is attested by inscriptions from the 2nd and 3rd centuries C.E.⁹⁵

CIL 3.2887=ILS 9067, with Breeze 1974, inscription, Corinium, Dalmatia, 2nd C.AD
(Sculpture of a soldier) To the spirits of the departed, in honour of Pletorius Primus, clerk of the treasury of the fourth praetorian cohort, century of Silvanus, from the province of Lower Pannonia, born at castle Vixillum, who lived thirty-five years, four months, served fifteen years, eight months. Veturia Digna set this up for her estimable husband.

CIL 6.2544=ILS 2066, inscription, Rome, 3rd C.AD Aulus Saufeius Emax, Son of Publius, of the tribe Camilia, from Ansium (?), soldier of the ninth praetorian cohort, century of Firmius Tertullus, served [---] years, clerk of [---] a tribune, officer of the watchword, o[rderly], decorated by

91 R. W. Davies, *The Daily Life of the Roman Soldier under the Principate*. ANRW II.1 (1974): 299-338.

92 R. McMullen, *Soldier and civilian in the Later Roman Empire*. (Harvard Historical Monographs LII.) (New York: Harvard University Press, 1963), 50.

93 McMullen, *Soldier & Civilian*, 68.

94 McMullen, *Soldier & Civilian*, 70.

95 Campbell, *Sourcebook*, 41.

Emperor [---] Caesar Augustus, with
necklaces [---]

Campbell comments: “Among the praetorians there was the same range of specialist functions, clerkships, and other posts of limited responsibility as in the legions.”

From the necessity of having a military guard to the need for military and other official record keeping, a historical perspective would admit a probability of soldiers being members of Caesar’s household staff. This does not exclude the equally valid view that many of the household staff consisted of freedmen and slaves. When the residential establishment of the Emperor was the *de facto* government of the Empire and was the place where affairs of state were decided, Lightfoot’s opinion that it included “the meanest slave as well as the most powerful courtiers”⁹⁶ perhaps gives a truer image of the extent of the household. “In a military system such as that of the Empire, the soldiers and officers of the guard formed an important part of the household. That household, however, was an immense affair, including hundreds or even thousands of persons.”⁹⁷ Is it possible that Paul’s enthusiasm about the gospel penetrating the praetorian ranks was occasioned by his realization of this implication? Because of direct or indirect contact, potentially the gospel could enter the imperial household through the Praetorian guards and perhaps even reach the ears of the emperor.

Three other commentators are prepared to be more forthcoming about a link between the “πραιτωρι- and “Καίσαρος οἰκίας” but provide a range of opinion regarding conversions to Christianity. Hendriksen, for example, only hints at the possibility. While his images of soldiers listening “with a measure of disdain or hardly listened at all”,⁹⁸ progressing to being “deeply moved”, “deeply impressed”, “interested and then – enthusiastic”,⁹⁹ may be dismissed

96 J. B. Lightfoot, *The Epistles of St. Paul: Philippians*. (London: Macmillan & Co., 1883), 171.

97 Robert Rainey, *The Epistle to the Philippians*. (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1893), 47.

98 Wm. Hendriksen, *Philippians*. (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1962), 69.

99 Hendriksen, *Philippians*, 69.

as contextual imagination, it is reasonable to suggest that soldiers would have talked about what they had heard and seen. If soldiers did reach the point of “interest” and “enthusiasm” then this tentatively suggests the potential of conversion. Hendriksen also comments that the news spread from the guards to Caesar’s household, thereby implying a close connection between the two. These statements perhaps require too much reading between the lines to reach a conclusion about conversion, but the impression that this is what Hendriksen has in mind comes through in the portrayal of progression from “disdain” to “enthusiasm” of the soldiers’ reaction to Paul and his message.

Baur asks the very pertinent question. “But how had Christianity gained access to the imperial house?”¹⁰⁰ Baur sees the Clement mentioned in 4:3 as a key figure but he gives equal weight to the influence of the Praetorian Guard.

Here, then, was a door through which, as soon as it had found belief in the Praetorium, Christianity might penetrate to the house of the emperor. Thus one circumstance fits into another in a perfectly natural way, and it is easy to account for the emphasis on the ‘advance of the gospel’ and the apostle’s imprisonment for Christ having become known ‘among all the Praetorium and all the rest’ at the very beginning of the Epistle. Two pieces of data are given: the Roman Clement, on the one hand, and the praefectus praetorio, on the other. What lies between the two – the interest of the whole Praetorium in Paul and Christianity, and the conversion of several members of the imperial house – follows as a natural consequence from these two pieces of data.¹⁰¹

100 F. C. Baur, *Paul, the Apostle of Jesus Christ*. Vol.2 (London/Edinburgh: Williams and Norgate, 1875), 59.

101 Baur, *Philippians*, 60.

Baur thus gives explicit expression to the link between the military and the household and includes conversion in that connection. Lightfoot is more ambiguous, but linking the soldiers with the palace in the context of “fruit” and “influence”, at the very least, implies that conversion did occur.

The praetorian soldiers, drafted off successively to guard him and constrained while on duty to bear him close company, had opportunities of learning his doctrine and observing his manner of life, which were certainly not without fruit. He had not been in Rome very long, before he could boast that his bonds were not merely known but known in Christ throughout the praetorian guard. In the palace of the Caesars too his influence was felt.¹⁰²

It is true that none of these commentators explicitly states that there were converts among the Praetorian guards, so the opinions of Thielman, Hendriksen, Baur and Lightfoot could merely be examples of ‘reading too much into the text’. However, of the eight epitaphs found inscribed on tombs of Christian soldiers in the pre-Constantine period, six were found in Rome.¹⁰³ Thus, regardless of how tenuous the connection, the possibility of Christians serving in the Praetorian Guard cannot be dismissed out of hand. Philippians 1:12-13 leaves no doubt about the impact on the unit. Indeed, to exclude the possibility of soldier converts in this situation is to deny the effectiveness of Paul’s ministry and witness during this two-year period. Since Paul does claim that the gospel had been advanced and made known throughout the whole Praetorian Guard, at the very

¹⁰² Lightfoot, *Philippians*, 19.

¹⁰³ Roland H. Bainton, *Christian Attitudes Towards War and Peace. A Historical and Critical Evaluation*. (London: Abingdon Press, 1960),69-70.

least a considerable number¹⁰⁴ of soldiers had been exposed to his message. Given Paul's reputation as a missionary, can it be stated categorically that no soldier was converted?

Karl Barth is one commentator who is not prepared to countenance an affirmative response to this question. He advises abiding by the simple translation and interpretation of verse 13, which indicates that "Paul's imprisonment has become in Rome a well-known and much talked-of affair."¹⁰⁵ When Paul's proven missionary effectiveness becomes part of this equation, possibility of conversion could easily become probability! Barth is prepared to endorse this view:

Paul's case has not remained in the sphere of an obscure lawsuit that concerns only those immediately involved. On the contrary, the fact of his imprisonment has become a *Word* that is at all events *noised abroad*, a *problem* which troubles the neighbourhood – and that not only the immediate neighbourhood – and stirs them up to think and question. And Paul will surely have had even more in mind than that: this Word has been heard, it has proved itself not only a problem, but a real power, it has met with not only interest but *faith*. It surely could not be otherwise..."¹⁰⁶
(italics – the author's own)

Just over thirty years later, Rapske also sees the fading into insignificance of the legal basis for Paul's imprisonment. The freedom which he had been given to preach and teach was perhaps

104 Webster, *Roman Army*, 97. The legion at this time numbered approximately 6000 – inscriptions have been found bearing witness to the existence of cohort XII in the 40s C.E. and each cohort had 500 men. This was not increased until the 60s "when Vitellius in the panic of the Civil War enrolled 16 [cohorts] from legions loyal to himself."

105 Karl Barth, *The Epistle to the Philippians*, (London: SCM Press Ltd 1962), 26-27.

106 Barth, *Philippians*, 27-28.

the best testimony to the “significant and highly-placed Roman estimate of the trial’s probable outcome, i.e., that Paul will be released. Rapske’s findings lead him to see Paul’s relative freedom to preach as Roman tolerance generally, but more specifically to, “the official leniency of the soldier who guarded him.”¹⁰⁷ Winter’s research into Gallio’s ruling in the legal status of early Christianity (Acts 18: 14-15) leads him to conclude from the use of the word “unhindered” in other extant official documents that Festus had confirmed this ruling and that Paul had done nothing contrary to Roman law.¹⁰⁸

What Luke indicated was that although Paul was under the constant eye of a Roman guard, he was not in breach of Roman law by engaging in preaching and teaching. No charge of felony or political misdemeanour would be levelled against him on the basis of these activities in Rome.

This suggests none of those who guarded Paul regarded his conversations with overt hostility or suspicion. We cannot speculate on the range of opinions among those who guarded Paul, but, by his own maxim, if “faith comes by hearing....”¹⁰⁹ can we assert that all the apostle’s preaching and teaching fell on deaf ears? Meeks, from a sociological perspective, accepts that Paul was imprisoned in Rome and that he “clearly does believe ... that the witness of his imprisonment ‘in Christ’ (v13) has produced a favourable impression that creates the possibility of conversions among the personnel of the praetorium.”¹¹⁰ Anderson, a ‘pacifist’ writer, goes further than the commentators, with the exception of Barth, to explicitly claim:

107 Rapske, *Paul in Roman Custody*, 18.

108 B. W. Winter, “Gallio’s Ruling on the Legal Status of Early Christianity (Acts 18:14-15),” *Tyndale Bulletin* 50:2 (1999): 213-224, 224.

109 Romans 10:14.

110 Meeks, *First Urban Christians*, 63.

“certainly soldiers were recruited into the Christian community”¹¹¹ citing Philippians 1:13 and 4:22.

Figure 4 would appear to suggest his assessment is correct for it indicates the presence of Christian soldiers in Rome at the end of the first and into the second century AD.¹¹² While not a flattering portrayal, the *graffito* indicates the presence of Christian soldiers at the Palatine in Rome, the seat of the imperial palace. It was discovered “behind a pillar in the Pedagogium on the Palatine during the 2nd century,”¹¹³ an edifice erected on the Palatine hill by Domitian for military and Olympic games training.¹¹⁴ It depicts a satirical perception of the Christian God, attributed to Tacitus by Tertullian, who was aware of it even by AD197. In the *Apology* he states: “For, like some others, you are under the delusion that our god is an ass’s head.”¹¹⁵

Fig. 4. Graffito found in the Pedagogium

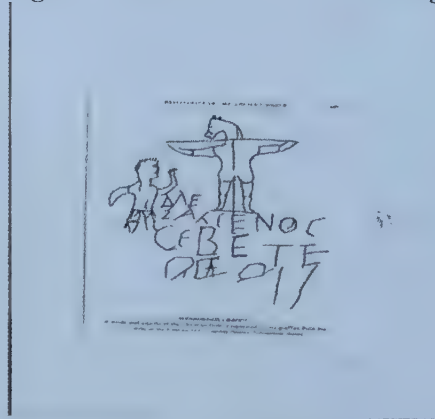


Illustration taken from *Backgrounds of Early Christianity* by Everett Ferguson.

¹¹¹ P. N. Anderson, “Jesus and Peace,” M. E. Miller & B. N. Gingerich, eds., *The Church’s Peace Witness*. (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1994), 160.

¹¹² Everett Ferguson, *Backgrounds of Early Christianity*. 3rd. ed., (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2003), 597.

¹¹³ www.geocities.com/Christprize/pagan-origins.html. No other details given. The site deals with the pagan origins of Christianity.

¹¹⁴ www.activitaly.it/inglese/monument/palatino.htm. This is a tourist information site.

¹¹⁵ Tertullian, *Apology* 16, 52. A. Roberts & J. Donaldson, eds. “The Ante-Nicene Fathers.” Vol.3. *The Master Christian Library*. CD-ROM Version 8 (Rio, Wisconsin 53960: Ages Software Inc., 2000).

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If an impact was made on members of the Praetorian Guard, then the implication of this was particularly relevant to the Christian community at Philippi. The Acts account of the conversion of the Philippian jailer, who is generally believed to have been a soldier, is an indication of relevance. Bockmuehl¹¹⁶ expresses the consensus that “it remains entirely possible that Luke’s account reflects an authentic local tradition about the Philippian jailer as one of the city’s first converts.” Since evidence also shows that Philippi was one of the earliest veteran colonies and retained its military ethos, Geoffrion and Krentz regard the mention of ‘πραιτωρι-’ as significant for two reasons. Firstly, because it provides a direct connection between the locations of the writer and recipients of the letter. Geoffrion’s stated aim is to examine the political and military character of the letter to the Philippians, examining the “nuanced meaning and function” of Paul’s terminology “within the overall rhetorical argument.”¹¹⁷ For this purpose ancient literary sources have been used in the analysis of the linguistic and conceptual aspects of key words.¹¹⁸ His acceptance of the military ethos of the city can be demonstrated by the fact that it is not beyond the bounds of possibility that P. Mucius was *duovir* at Philippi at about the time of Paul’s visit there, the significance being that his tombstone inscription identifies him as a “centurion of the Legion VI Ferrata, *duovir* (i.e. joint mayor) with judicial powers at Philippi.”¹¹⁹

In his essay, Krentz puts the words mentioned by Geoffrion into their respective contexts in ancient writings, basing his conclusions on a

116 Marcus Bockmuehl, ‘Effective History’ of Philippians,” 16.

117 Timothy C. Geoffrion, *The Rhetorical Purpose and the Political and Military Character of Philippians: A Call to Stand Firm*. (New York: Mellen Biblical Press, 1993), 29.

118 For example:- στήκετε - used as opposed to ‘flee’: φοβος - in the sense of being intimidated by an enemy: σωτηρια - used as opposed to ‘destruction’: αναθλιω (which occurs only in 1:27 and 4:3 in the NT). - contending together: πιστις - pledge: πτυρομενοι - not found elsewhere in the Greek Bible - Used of battle by Diodorus of Sicily and by Plutarch: ἀντικειμενοι - used in the sense of military adversaries in Exodus 23:22: ἀγων - battle. Pythagorus, Socrates, Aristotle, and Stoics, Epictetus and Seneca are cited., It was Seneca who said ‘vivere militare est’.

119 Saddington, “Military Personnel”, 2430.

much wider range of sources.¹²⁰ Specifically, he describes a Philippian coin depicting the goddess Victoria with the obverse showing “three military standards ringed by a beaded ‘milling’ with the legend COHOR(s) to the left and PRAE(toria) to the right.”¹²¹ Rapske agrees that “Philippi was the place that many Macedonians recruited into the Praetorian Guard....ended their days.”¹²² These claims are reinforced by an inscription from Rome in the 3rd century AD.¹²³ The language used on the coinage is also relevant, for Latin was the official language of the Roman army. Inscriptions and coins similar to those described remained in circulation with little alteration until the reign of Commodus, with their designation of Philippi as ‘*Colonia Augusta Julia Philippenis*’ remaining on the coinage “until at least the first half of the third century.”¹²⁴

Secondly, this link alone opens the possibility of further communication between serving and veteran soldiers and the latter’s families. If the claims made elsewhere are true, that Christianity reached Rome via “traders, businessmen or soldiers”,¹²⁵

120 E. M. Krentz, *Military Language and Metaphors in Philippians*. Essay in Origins & Method: Towards a New Understanding of Judaism & Christianity. (JSNT Supp. Series 86) (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1993). Historians – Tacitus, Herodotus, Thucydides, Xenophon, Polybius, Dionysius of Halicarnassus, Diodorus, Siculus, Appian, Arrian; Orators – Lysias, Aeschines, Demosthenes; Biographer – Plutarch; Philosophers – Socrates, Seneca, Epictetus, Hierocles (2nd century Stoic), Military Tactical Manuals – Aeneas, Tacitus, Asclepiodotus, Onosander, Polycienus: plus inscriptions.

121 Krentz, *Military Language*, 116-117.

122 Rapske, *Paul in Roman Custody*, 262.

123 Campbell, *Sourcebook*, 42. CIL6.2601=ILS2055. To the spirits of the departed, in honour of Aurelius Bitus, cavalryman of the sixth praetorian cohort, of Thracian nationality, citizen of Philippopolis, of more or less thirty-five years, who served seventeen years as follows: in Legion 1 Italica, two years, in the second praetorian cohort as an ordinary soldier, fourteen years; when promoted cavalry; Valerius Aulusanus, praetorian guardsman to his most worthy and matchless brother. Unfortunately there is no indication of whether Valerius was a brother by blood kin or a ‘brother-in-arms’. If the former, this inscription could be evidence for a family tradition of military service.

124 Krentz, *Military Language*, 112; Meeks, *First Urban Christians*, 45. Philippian coins “show the same persistence of the Italian element: military motifs predominate and the city’s full Latin title persists until the reign of Gallienus.” Mikael Tellbe, *Paul between Synagogue and State. Christians, Jews, and Civic Authorities in 1 Thessalonians, Romans and Philippians*. (Cometanea Biblica New Testament Series 34) (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell International, 2001), 213. “In the middle of the first century CE, Philippi reflected clearly this Latin and military nature ... Latin seems to have taken over the role as the official language.”

125 Gerald F. Hawthorne, Ralph P. Martin, & Daniel G. Reid, eds., *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters*. (Leicester: I.V.P., 1993), 83.

dissemination when a direct connection existed between the locations where members of the same military unit lived and settled cannot be discounted. Levick's assertion that "such towns...possess a strong military tradition, and there would be a tendency for sons to follow their father's profession"¹²⁶ indicated the continuation of a tradition "strengthened by a demonstrable use of Latin"¹²⁷ and it leads to the conclusion that the military ethos of the town was still discernible in Paul's day. Geoffrion appears to be in no doubt about this. He writes:

We cannot recover how many, if any of the Philippian Christians were actually descendants of the first military colonists, *but we can be sure they shared in the general ethos of the city.*¹²⁸ Paul's charge to live worthily of their political loyalties and his use of the military metaphor would have been understood by Greek and Roman alike, but especially appreciated by those in a city with a political and military heritage such as Colonia Augusta Julia Philippiensis.¹²⁹

In the light of the 'praetorian' connection and the strength of Latin as the official language of the town, these rhetorical-linguistic studies

126 Barbara Levick, *Roman Colonies in Southern Asia Minor*. (London: O.U.P., 1967), 144.

Pliny, *Letter* 10:87, 291. Pliny writes to Trajan recommending the son of the centurion he brought out of retirement for promotion. "Nymphidius Lupus, an honest, hard-working young man, well worthy of his excellent father. He will prove equal to any mark of your favour, as you may judge from his first military appointment as commander of a cohort, for which he has won the highest praise ... Any promotion which you confer on my friend's son, Sir, will give me also an occasion for personal rejoicing."

127 Levick, *Roman Colonies*, 144. Levick, *Roman Colonies*, 161. She comments on the "astonishing vigour" of Latin. Krentz, *Military Language*, 112. Latin was not "superseded by Greek until the reign of Constantine." R. McMullen, *Soldier and civilian in the Later Roman Empire*. 96. "Soldiers also spread Latin, not only by making it the official army speech which all recruits must learn, no matter what their background, but also by simply living, marrying, buying, drinking and walking about a garrisoned area."

128 My italics.

129 Geoffrion, *Rhetorical Purpose of Philippians*, 38.

and that of Levick are very relevant to the topic in question. They make explicit what is only implicit in the commentaries. Indeed, there is an almost exultant tone in Philippians 1:12-13 that, at the very least, Paul, his cause and his gospel were a matter of gossip in military barracks and beyond.

CONCLUSION

The mention of ‘πραιτωρι- signals a breach in the ‘silence’ which has characterised early Christianity and military service, for it indicates the extent to which the Gospel became known to the military forces within Rome, its potential impact on ‘Caesar’s household’; and, because of its bond with Philippi, shows the potential for the extension of the gospel message through that one unit to families or communities with military connections. Admittedly much of the evidence to hand is circumstantial but, taken *in toto*, it is compelling enough to warrant circumspection before making any categorical denials of the possibility/probability of conversions among the Praetorian Guard in Rome or their military connections in Philippi.

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